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C O N F I D E N T I A L BELGRADE 000277

SIPDIS

DOJ FOR ALEXANDRE

E.O. 12958: DECL: CLOSURE OF ICTY

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SR](#) [ICTY](#)

SUBJECT: MLADIC UPDATE

Classified By: CDA Roderick Moore, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite rampant press speculation, the GoS continues to vehemently deny, both in private and in public, that it is any closer to apprehending Mladic. Nevertheless, the degree of scrutiny given to this most recent "Mladic sighting" indicates a shift in expectations in the Serbian public and among the political elite about the possibility of Mladic being captured in the near future. End summary.

¶2. (u) Local and international media continue to speculate about the possibility of Mladic's capture. Since the story initially broke on the basis of a report from a local Reuters stringer in Republika Srpska that was carried on a local RS TV station, press in Serbia have made a wide range of predictions, all without any apparent factual basis - that Mladic has been captured, that he is being held on a US military base near Tuzla, that he has been located, and/or that he has been surrounded at an undisclosed location.

¶3. (u) These stories, and similar speculation in the international media (including most UK and US-based electronic outlets) have continued for a second day despite two separate denials from the Serbian government that Mladic has been found or captured. Most recently, ICTY chief prosecutor del Ponte released a statement aired on BBC World denying that Mladic has been captured.

¶4. (c) We have canvassed a wide array of contacts in the past 24 hours, including at the ministerial level in the SaM government, and in the local ICTY office, the analytical community, and the VBA and BIA. All report the same thing: that there is no basis in fact for current reporting. Our government contacts strenuously maintain that there has been no breakthrough on Mladic, and our community and IO contacts (and privately, some media contacts) say essentially the same thing, with a lesser degree of certainty.

¶5. (c) Similar reports of Mladic's capture originating from a RS TV story were floated several months ago, obviously without merit. While the government is unequivocal in its public and private remonstrations that Mladic has been or is close to being captured, the stories have generated follow-on speculation in the analytical community that the GoS has something in the works and is using these reports as a trial balloon to gauge possible public reaction before announcing the general's capture. One well-connected analyst told us on February 21 that "there is no story today, but there might be one in the days to come."

¶6. (c) COMMENT: While these reports themselves are not new, they reflect a change in public and private expectations at all levels of Serbian society that Mladic's apprehension is a real possibility, and might be a question of weeks or months. Latest public opinion polls show majority support for Mladic's forcible arrest, and local analysts and political contacts now seem more ready to believe that the GoS may come through in the foreseeable future. We continue to pulse our contacts regularly and will report further developments as they occur.

MOORE